



MESSAGE

FROM MAYOR DAN GELBER

This morning, Tuesday April 7, the State Department of Health has reported that COVID-19 cases in Miami-Dade County surpassed 4,600 and 58 people in our County have succumbed to the virus. The Department is now breaking down infections in Florida by zip codes. The 33140 zip code -- which represents the heart of our City -- has the third highest number of confirmed infections of the 1500 zip codes in Florida. While I still believe the data is flawed and incomplete -- and that the lack of available and timely testing and reliable forecasts from the state, have left us navigating in the dark -- the volume of infections in our community remains as our only data point until more complete testing becomes available. The fact that this data shows that we currently rank third out of 1500 zip codes should be an unambiguous signal that we cannot let up from adhering to the guidelines and directions we're getting.

Going into effect today -- we are requiring that employees and customers wear face masks at grocery stores, pharmacies and restaurants. This is a new CDC guideline and its purpose is to reduce the shedding of the virus-- especially from people who may not even know they are carrying it. Your face coverings need not be professional grade -- in fact, they shouldn't be, as those are best saved for health care workers doing their jobs -- so a bandana or scarf or something homemade will suffice. Scientists believe the virus spreads from respiratory droplets expelled into the air even before symptoms actually manifest so covering your face -- even with a little cloth -- helps to protect others and to reduce the spread of infections. It is definitely not a replacement for social distancing, washing hands and other measures -- but merely an additional guard against infection that is recommended and believed to have worked in other places. And these are easy to make at home -- YouTube has loads of easy options -- a special shout out to Valentina, a 6th grader at Nautilus Middle School who is making homemade masks for friends and family.

Many have reached out upset about this measure. Some have asked why we would mandate masks when the CDC issued this recommendation as only a suggestion. Here is why. The CDC ONLY issues suggestions -- the federal government for whatever reason -- has chosen to only give suggestions and guidance as to best practices but is not really ordering anyone to do anything -- which means we can treat best practices as totally optional and hope people comply -- or hope that in the absence of our City enacting its own requirements, the Governor and others will decide what is in our best interests. But hope, while terrific, is not a plan. And it just doesn't work for our City as most statewide directives don't necessarily address our local challenges. In places where they are mandating compliance with guidelines for best practices, they are making gains in flattening the curve.

And make no mistake about it, we are still behind. Because this virus spreads silently often for weeks unannounced, we tend to only implement countermeasures when we see an observable impact -- which means we are usually already past the tipping point when we begin taking preventative actions. We can't keep waiting to act. While we don't know with great clarity when we can expect to "peak" -- or how many of us will be infected -- or even how many will ultimately succumb to the virus -- the fact that we are one of the most infected regions in the state should counsel that we can't merely "hope" people comply with these best practices. Remember, as of this morning 58 people have died in Miami-Dade County -- including some in our own City. We cannot treat "best practices" as simply advisory or merely optional.

While I hear those who believe these measures are more than what is necessary -- and believe me, I hope with all my heart they are right-- I also know, if we respond in a way that is less than we needed to, that will mean we failed horribly and people were hospitalized or died because we chose to assume a rosier scenario.

So please, we need to lean into these measures no matter how intrusive or challenging.

A couple more things.

Today we learned that our convention center will be used by the state Department of Emergency Management as a temporary alternative care facility. Very soon they will begin the build out and we expect that they will construct at least 450 beds -- with capacity for much more if necessary. The facility will be completed quickly and likely remain vacant unless and until necessary. Please understand this is a precaution to assure that we are fully prepared for a worst-case scenario and that our community will never face shortages of beds or equipment. Hopefully, it won't ever be occupied. It is also consistent with what is happening around the nation with other convention centers. Currently, many of our hospitals like Mt. Sinai have reduced their bed count substantially in order to make room for an expected increase as the virus's spread continues.

Finally, this is a holy week for many who are observing Easter and it is also the Jewish holiday of Passover. The messages of Easter and Passover are fundamentally joyous -- as both holidays celebrate freedom and renewal -- a time when we rejoice in our traditions and history as they relate and connect to the values of today. It's so important to honor these values by respecting the health of those we love most and those we may not even know. Please follow the directions of your faith leaders and your physicians who are absolutely united in their opinion that we must continue in our commitment to social distancing and not gather even to celebrate our faith.

The notion that we are unable to gather during these treasured holidays is proof enough that these are extraordinary and challenging times -- but it is precisely in these moments when we should expect more from ourselves and each other. Yes, we know one day soon we will put this in our rearview mirror -- and we will regain our footing and sense of normalcy -- but until then let's lean in to fight this virus together.

Thanks for your patience and calm. Stay healthy and at home.